Lavertia: Die
Geschichte
zweier
Prinzessinnen

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Lavertia: Die Geschichte zweier Prinzessinnen

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Chapter 1

~Faerie's Whim~

"Thank you for your time, Dr Collins."

My mum concluded the dragging hour with the same tiresome words that she repeated every week, while the doctor in question only nodded his head in acknowledgement. It was his regular reply; he rarely permitted his attention to waver from me, still hoping - perhaps naively - to discover something of consequence in my smooth motions. My empty eyes remained on the beige of the wall as I felt his eyes upon my rising form, my mum placing a gentle hand on my forearm to steer me upwards.

I echoed her words, although everyone who heard them recognised the difference in tone. Her voice rang in the air, held down only by defeat of my quiet nature. Mine, on the other hand, was so rarely used that each note seemed so detached and unnatural that no matter how long one was given to become accustomed to the sound, nothing ever sounded right in my voice.

"Yes, thank you, Dr Collins."

The little hope that had dared to stir behind his small square glasses - the hope that remained discreet in his patient eyes by profession - vanished when my lips sealed again. After all this time he expected nothing more that those five words, but each week, he loyally remained attentive and observant.

"Any time, Elvira, you know where to find me." I refused to meet his eyes as he enacted his traditional farewell, despite the obviousness of their stationary position on mine. I simply nodded, allowing an acceptance of the information but promising nothing more. He too rose from his chair, and held the lonesome door for yet another departure. I kept my

distant sight straight ahead as I walked on, followed by my mum and her worried sigh.

She didn't move her protective hand from my arm as she stalled for a moment for a whispered word with the man behind me. I heard his hasty reply, but the husky tone of the doctor was too low for me to distinguish any meaning from the hum. Her reluctance gave the impression that she was afraid I would run if she let go, worried I might disappear from her world unless I was at her side. I couldn't blame her.

There was no change in her eyes as she listened to his trained opinion. Without consciously realising it, she tightened her hand. I waited while their exchange continued, but there was only a few seconds before we were moving. Her tension was almost impossible to ignore as we passed the front desk and reached the pearly door.

My heart skipped a beat when my eyes swiftly combed upwards and away from the gravel beneath me. Aside from our aged Octavia, only two cars dared to encroach upon the spacious lot. Mum

stiffened at my hesitation, but I glossed it over quickly, knowing from experience that it would be forgotten by tomorrow. Dad was waiting by the car.

"How was it?" he asked. His voice was sympathetic as I opened my door. Mum's frantic eyes leapt to me, anxious to have me out of her grasp even for such a short spell.

"The same as always," I replied. My lips didn't move and no sound escaped them as I answered his query. I didn't need to speak for him to hear me. I made sure to keep my expression clean as I looked up at him and my thoughts countered with their own question. "What are you doing here?"

"Would you rather I went away again?" he joked, eluding my words with ease.

"Never," I amended instantly. "I would rather you'd never gone to begin with."

As I looked up into his shattered eyes, I saw the spirit of the man that stood before me. I knew that to anyone passing, or watching, or even to my own

mother, it would appear that I was seeing nothing but the towering, unwelcoming office behind him.

"Honey, you know I had no choice," he reminded me softly. His wisdom-filled eyes rested longingly on Mum for a moment.

"You did," I remembered. I blinked quickly before the forming tears could rise, well aware that I needed to hide this encounter from Mum - from everyone. Every confrontation or exchange was remembered but never told, if only because I couldn't bear to let a single second with him slip through my mind. "You did."

"Sweetie," Dad ran his strong fingers through my thick hair, holding my gaze as the honestly of his words encased me. "I could never let them take you. Never."

He pressed his frozen lips to my forehead and I shivered. As he pulled away, I had to resist the undying urge to fling my arms around him, to comfort him. I didn't care if his touch was cold, or if his glimmering skin was as white as fallen snow. He

was still my Dad, no matter what had changed. He was my Dad inside.

"I'll be back tonight," he promised in my ear, the familiarity of his deep words wrapping softly around me. I watched only his darkened eyes fade as he melted seamlessly into the wind.

"Elvira? Are you alright?" Mum's voice intruded upon my thoughts, pulling me quickly and harshly back to the naïve world around me.

I didn't answer; she didn't expect me to. I took a deep breath to regain my lost composure before turning to face the car and climb silently into my seat. She looked imploringly at me in the central mirror. Her eyes were cautious - as always - but troubled by my irregular pause. I aimed my gaze out of the streaked window, unable to handle seeing the defeat in hers.

I couldn't tell her. I wanted to - more than anything, I did - but she couldn't know. I knew the consequence if she was ever to find out. At the knowledge of Dad's disappearance - not his death - and the realisation that he returned every year, she would be overjoyed. For me to tell her that there was a way to see Dad

again could be the only way to repair the ripped and broken state she was left in after he vanished, but I knew the penalty. I knew it would only be a matter of time before her death if she ever found out.

I didn't see the entrancing neighbourhood that whipped past my window. The sting of my eyes as the cool air hit them was refreshing; reviving.

Over the years, Mum had sent me to countless shrinks, numerous GPs, and endless psychiatrists, and I ended every tasteless session in the same way. Truly, I knew I had little to be thankful for, but I continually said it all the same. After a short while, most people gave up on me. Dr Collins hadn't - yet. His unyielding determination almost made me feel guilty for my repeated actions every time we met. I doubted that he could ever appear as the 'friend' he endeavoured to be in my eyes, but any well-earned attention from me would probably reveal that he was more than simply another unconcerned professional.

Every week, and today, as Mum always arranged and appointment for October 31st, I stayed silent,

excluding the concise greetings and farewells under my mother's eye. I always pulled my legs up so that I was cross-legged on the soft, armless seat and my position reflected my body's relaxed state. I made sure to ignore the slow ticks of the wall's high clock. I never used forced or hurried movements, allowing my at-ease gaze to glide smoothly across the room. Most importantly of all, I never reacted to his words until I knew we were about to part. If he mentioned anything that was likely to pull a reaction from me - which he did with a surreal regularity - I mentally blocked his voice from my mind.

Mum knew, and therefore everyone else did too, that this all began when Dad was first taken. She passed this precious knowledge on to everyone who claimed they could help, so they all attempted to exploit this in their time. If I changed my motion, rectified my posture, or moved in any noticeable way, I knew they would pressure that point for as long as they could. That was why everything I did in a doctor's presence was absent and detached. That philosophy worked well for everyone else as well.

It wasn't always easy. In fact, it rarely was, but I had to make it appear so. I couldn't tell anyone the truth - but, really, if I did, who would believe it? Any mention of faeries would send a listener away, accompanied by worries for my sanity - especially when I shined my light on their innocent reputation.

"Love, I need to pop out for a while," Mum said hesitantly, dropping the car's speed to a crawl. "I need you to stay home, ok?"

I didn't answer. I knew I wasn't going to be able to promise that for long - I just had to distinguish what my mum's interpretation of 'a while' equated to. If it would keep me inside after moon rise, I couldn't agree.

"Please love? This is really important," she continued. "I should only be an hour or two at most."

My eyes flicked to the sweltering sun that hovered painlessly overhead, and then to the clock on the dashboard. I tended to avoid speaking to my mum - not out of worry or dislike, my aversion was from the fear of the omnipresent look of loss in her eyes when

she heard my voice. Every time I spoke, that strangled look only tightened.

Although I tried to keep my gaze out of the window, I couldn't resist an irresponsible glance in her direction. "Sure Mum." My stomach clenched when I was the look hardening again.

The car pulled to a halt at the end of our drive and I got out. Mum's eyes were locked. "Do you have your key?"

My fingers found the twist of metal in my pocket upon impulse and I nodded rather than risk speech again. After two steps in the direction of the tattered house, the engine behind me spluttered to life and the car shot away down the street.

I knew where she was going, and why I wasn't invited. I couldn't be near Dad's memorial. Mum thought it was because I was so shaken by what had happened, but as far as she knew all that had happened was that Dad never came back after he'd slipped out while she was out and I was asleep. What really happened was much more terrifying.

I was shaking before I reached the door. I managed to stay stable until I was inside the house but not much longer. After staggering to the closest chair and collapsing into its comforting hold, I heard the front door swing shut behind me, the clamorous lock falling instantly into place. I didn't have to do more than close my aching eyes before a familiar scene played out around me.

The silence that echoed eerily around the dark forest was only disturbed by the splintering crackles of fallen leaves as a hesitant figure moved through the tight trees. The long, bark-shaded hair that tumbled in thick waves to her waist seemed to tremble in fear, and the soothing chocolate-brown of her cautious eyes contrasted perfectly again her olive skin, paler than usual as she saw what was before her.

She could easily sense the intent gaze that followed her, but didn't halt. She consciously averted her weary eyes from the direction she knew her observer to be, but one second of lost focus would render this aversion broken.

This distraction came in the defined sound of a body other than her own within the entwining branches twisting around her. She was aware that the joining of their branches had only begun after her entrance into the mysterious hollow created by the oak circle. She couldn't go back. Retreat would mean failure and proving to her unknown audience the strength of the fear that engulfed her. The creak of settling boughs finalised the separation of her from the rest of the tranquil world.

The shivers rolled relentlessly down her spine, and she felt the catch of her breathing as she felt another soul advancing upon her person; an inhuman soul. The realisation of the detail froze her resolve, and before she could realise her mistake her eyes flicked involuntarily towards her motionless watcher. With a thud of her heart, she found herself immobile with fear, and knew immediately that the frozen state was irreversible by will.

A faint pressure appeared on the small of her back, proving that it was her terror that held her stationary. She knew what the pressure was, but fear

wrapped so tightly around her that she was unable to move - even slightly - to appease the faerie's whim. The ink black, emotionless pupils that focused on her still form refused to yield their heartless gaze.

The force that compelled her to step forwards was growing on her, but the racing of her frantic heart held her in place, open to anything that these mystic creatures could dare to dream for her. She didn't see the small glows and sparks of light of smaller beings that risked an approach, or hear the wind-chime whispers that recurred around her. The rose-white face that emerged from the shadows to surround the blackness of the eyes she saw was marble smooth and mesmerising; the curves and strands of soot-black hair that flowed graciously down to the leaf strewn floor were nothing but entrancing; and even as a foreign sense of calm pulsed through her, holding the heavy fear at bay, she couldn't turn away. A single glance from the ashen pupils of the faerie that faced her was enough to stop any human in their tracks, but without the relief of the ruthless eyes turning instantly away, the weight of the gaze was almost crushing. The unimaginable beauty of the

uncaring expression she saw was so stunning that she forgot all of her fears as she watched it.

The pressure on her back was still increasing, and it reached such a strength that she staggered forward despite her numbed state. The movement brought her closer to the figure as it stepped out from the growing darkness of the shadows. The tall figure was clothed in an exquisite cloak that seemed to pour down her elegant body, the slightest movement causing ripples to surge through the thick, scarlet cloth. The indisputable power emanating from her was emphasised by the silence of the lesser creatures that had gathered in silence, awaiting her command.

The serenity that had aroused within the motionless girl retracted its calming air but the fright couldn't move her eyes from the figure before her. She watched, frozen, as the cold figure lifted a slowed hand and stepped towards her. Her shallow breath caught for a single moment before the snowy hand touched gently but confidently to her forehead, the icy palm almost locking to her skin.

She felt her arms in the grasp of someone else, being pulled back behind her body so that she couldn't thrash out. At the same time, something clamped across her mouth to muffle her screams. Her eyes rolled back into her head and she sank to her knees under the pressure that suddenly crashed upon her. Every muscle in her body shrieked in agony, and she twisted in the restraining hold of the faerie behind her, trying to move, to escape the burning.

Every part of her was alight with the unseen flames dancing over her; the fire didn't halt for anything, ignoring even the strongest of barriers and pulsing through her. She writhed in pain, but no matter how much she moved or jerked, the touch of the faerie before her didn't leave her skin.

All of her senses were lost - she couldn't hear a sound, she couldn't see, couldn't taste the nature that had hung in the air - the only thing that existed was the licks of the raging fire as it curled and flared inside her. The only thing that she knew was that to stop the pain she had to escape the chilling touch

upon her. How could something so cold cause such blistering flames?

My eyes flew open.

I gasped as I sat up, drenched in a cold sweat with my head spinning with my eyes wide. My elbows buckled from their position behind me and I fell back. I watched my chest rise and fall rapidly before me as my swirling mind tried to disregard the fiendish nightmare that still ensnared my senses and twisted them into one, untameable mess of fear.

You're fine, I told myself as I forced the sharp air down my dry throat. You're fine.

After seven years to get used to the vision I relived every night, I only wished it would seem less terrifying. I hated knowing that the girl from the dream was me, and knowing that it was that evening forced my into the turmoil it now fell through.

The burning, twisting, thrashing and torture should have been the beginning of a new life, a new existence. It should have signified the start of a fresh experience for me, one which would permanently

change me. It should have been the night I transformed from human to fey.

I forced myself up and stood, swaying, for a moment. Although the decision of a drink wasn't conscious, it was enough to push me towards the kitchen. My hand was shaking as I reached for a glass, and I was so distracted that the water was overflowing by the time it occurred to me to halt the it.

I lifted the full glass to my shuddering lips and drank. The relief as the cool liquid slipped into me was incredible; unbelievable. My eyes focused on the dry, orange leaves from the aged trees at the end of the garden as they fluttered to the ground, the sharp wind hitting and picking at them while they fell.

At least, that's what it should have looked like.

Hiram's murky eyes leapt up to mine and I turned quickly away. My heart sped as I compressed the growing shudder that tried to seize me, but only just - only from years of practise. I kept my pace casual as I strode through to the lounge, well aware that his attention remained on me. I glanced swiftly out of

the window, but the sight of more faeries in the street crushed me.

I hurried through to my bedroom, forever glad that it was the one room in the house without a view into the outside world, and undeniably grateful that restrictions I could never understand prevented any faerie from entering this house, or any house.

I could see the spiteful beings all year round; every one of them was visible to me, whether they willed it or not, except my dad. The beginning of the transformation gave me sight, and left me marked.

I had one day of freedom - a single day in which none of the participants in my recurring nightmare could even touch me. On that day, they only seemed like a faint glimmer in the past. My single day of salvation was Hallows Day. My solitary means of escape from the shadows that tormented me all year round was tomorrow.

I watched the clock's hand moving slowly before me, watching my day edging slowly closer. I felt ecstatic to know that - even if I was for one day - I would be free tomorrow. But I had to get through tonight first.

My chest tightened as I thought about the next victim of the faeries' change.

They did it every year. They chose one person to transform into one of them; only one had ever gotten away, and that one was me. They were gaining from it, I knew they were. Now that I could see what they did but couldn't prevent it, I was in a worse state than if I had simply changed to one of them. Sometimes I even wished I had. If I had, Dad would still be here, with Mum, even if I wasn't. He wouldn't be going to a psychiatrist regularly, wouldn't have fallen irreversibly silent after my ninth Halloween, and wouldn't have to watch as Mum wished for anything other than me and my 'state' to be waiting for her at home.

Her eyes scraped up and down me, appraising my appearance. Apparently, she couldn't find anything remotely suggestive about my attire, because she was quiet for another moment when her eyes met mine. I wore no makeup, my outfit was merely a jumper and jeans, and my hair was pulled back into a ponytail to keep it out of the way. There was nothing predictable

about that; most sixteen-year-olds would be pushing their parents to the limit when it came to their looks. Mum was searching her mind for some kind of objection to my ensemble, but it was easy to see that her attempt was unsuccessful.

"Where are you going?" she eventually settled on, accepting that she couldn't keep me in on basis of my appearance.

"Out," I replied, avoiding her gaze. She would have thought that it meant I was lying if it wasn't for the fact that we had this conversation every year.

"Yes, but where?" she insisted.

I remained silent for a moment too long before I answered, trying to find some way to reassure her without lying. I tried every year, and every year I failed, so I repeated my age old reply once more. "Just around, Mum."

"Around where?" My silence provoked the same response it always did, and she began her lecture about protection of me. We both knew it was pointless, but she still tried. "Love, you don't know

how worrying this is for me. I mean, you always go out, never giving me a time or a place, never telling me who you're with, always after dark."

"Mum," I corrected robotically. "I go out once a year, never with anyone else, to somewhere completely safe and get back whenever I can." Only one part to that seemed like a lie to me.

"If you aren't with anyone, what holds you up?" she inquired. "You could just stay-"

"I have to go Mum," I told her, yet again, knowing that I could never give her the real reason. Even if she didn't understand where I went or what I did, she knew that much was true. When she said I couldn't go, I went anyway, returning in the early hours of the morning with no better excuses than I gave her at night, and took my punishment in silence. She never grounded me because I never went anywhere to be held from; she didn't tamper with my pocket money, knowing that it had no impact upon my actions; and she knew I would take scolding and shouts in silence without an ounce of retaliation.

"You don't have to sweetie," she assured me, reverting to her smooth, caring tone - the one that she rarely used since Dad had gone.

"Yes, I do," I promised her, turning away without another word and slipping through the door before she could stop me. She didn't move after the door closed and I glided easily down the path before I heard any motion inside the house. The long light fell over our unkempt lawn, and I jumped the fence at the end of the garden, retracing my steps into the darkness.

"Elvira, come back!" she called after me, no hope truly hovering on her tone.

"I will," I promised in a whisper. "I will."

All too soon I was tracing the familiar path to the oak-circled clearing. Just as always, I had to let my eyes skim across the body of another person in the position I had fallen to before, but remain powerless to prevent it. I had to hold my shudders and disgust inside me, and let someone else take what I should have gone through to become what I should be. I knew that if it had happened to me, nothing would

change; this would still happen. It just seemed wrong to know I had escaped what they never could.

I had to avert my eyes, and go to the one person I came to see.

"No - Dad-" I tried to hold on to him, but I should have known from the years' experience I held that this did no good. I did know it, but that didn't stop me trying. Before I could even finish, he was fading before my eyes. The time here had gone so quickly.

I watched, my expression heavy with dismay. His whole body started to weaken in colour, giving into the transparency that continually surrounded him. Words failed me as another blind year began.

Just before he went, Dad's frozen hand curved around my face and he pressed his chilled lips to my forehead once again. I didn't notice the unnatural coolness that surrounded his body as I tried to grasp it.

"I love you, don't forget that," he whispered in my ear. Those were his traditional parting words, so I

wasn't prepared for his last murmur when he spoke it. "And remember, this is your choice."

Then he was gone.

It wasn't like this afternoon. This time, I wouldn't see him later. I couldn't see him, the illusion of the faeries only allowed me to see him on this date every year, and only allowed a short time. Most faeries could choose visibility or invisibility, although most stayed unseen to complete their mischief. That was the deal. The only way that I could stay here, in normality, and he could live rather than be silenced for his discovery was that he didn't hold that ability.

Until midnight tomorrow, I knew he wasn't even here. Hallows Day was the name given to the day when everything good and magical came out, so Halloween was the night the faeries had; they were completely banished from midnight onwards, lasting twenty four hours - not only by visibility, but by being. They physically didn't exist in the day of the first of November.

I knew I hadn't needed to speak those last words. He could read my every thought; all faeries could when

you let them. That meant my mind remained a mystery to every other faerie here.

When I did speak, I only drew attention to myself, but that never stopped the final words from leaving my lips, and no matter how many times he departed, I could never bring myself to say goodbye.

My eyes flickered to the ground. One day without him, and then another three hundred and sixty three without seeing him. I had done it before I would do it again. I would have no choice.

Someone caught my arm just before I slipped under the entwining branches that isolated the wooden hollow. They spun me around with such force that I couldn't resist.

"Still coming, I see," said the first faerie. I stayed silent. "And still leaving before time. We miss you, you know."

I didn't say anything, I didn't even move. They didn't miss me; they missed the opportunity for laughter and cruelty. They were spiteful and laughing among each other, but the chance to bother me was more

entertaining. They couldn't say or do anything to the new one who'd been changed, and even if they could, few would be dumb enough to try. Even I knew that straight after a conversion the speed, strength and force of the young one overpowered the others.

"Why don't you stay?" asked another, running a hand through his ash-black hair. There wasn't really a question in his words, he only wanted to slow me. "Things could be fun. We won't bite you."

"Surely you could give us one night?" suggested the first again, his sapphire eyes shining. "One evening won't hurt."

"Or you could stay for longer," the last input. "Forever."

"I'll never be one of you," I told them. I repeated the phrase every year, but I could gradually feel the resolve behind the statement falling. Two of them smirked and the last spoke.

"Soon enough, you'll be dying to join us."

My stomach squirmed when I heard the words. I was already dying on the inside. I wanted nothing more

than to be a part of this frightening world instead of merely witnessing it. The logic of that whim seemed fake and wrong, but I understood it. After all these years of seeing what they did, I wanted to be a part of it so that I didn't have to merely watch it. Sure, I would feel some remorse in the beginning, when I knew what I was doing and remembered how terrifying it had always seemed; but that would pass.

All I was to them was a passing thought. They said their words, and then they moved on. They turned away and back to the clearing, leaving me to my own thoughts. I wasn't more than a vague interest to any of them, not worthy of more than a glance, and grateful for it. There was only one person who considered me anything more than that...

"It's a shame really," a familiarly unwelcome voice whispered in my ear. I moved abruptly away when he snaked his arm around my waist, but he moved faster and clamped me to his side. "I was all up for finishing the conversion and ditching him, but Mistress said otherwise."

"Let go of me," I said, no confidence sounding in my shattered tone. I heard the heinous laughs and chuckles behind me, but I ignored them. I fixed my gaze straight ahead when I spoke, and didn't allow the jumping of my fearful heart to show through on my expression. "Let go of me."

"Why love?" Hiram whispered, although the kissing wind carried his words through the rest of the circle. He pressed his lips to my neck and I jerked away. He let his lips fall away, but move the rest of his body with me, smiling at my distaste. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Let go of me," I repeated, freezing where I stood.

"Ah sweetie, don't be like that," he murmured. "Just because I said I'd rather have you than your old man. You must know you're better in every way."

"Get away from me." My voice refused to show anything in its tone, not allowing even a glimmer of emotion through my lips.

"Come on love, don't say that," he muttered, pouting his lips with every word. "You know how much I love

you. Just say yes. Go on. I can be anything you want - give you anything you want. I could even do you a trade if you wanted."

"Just stay away from me," I told him, feeling his murky eyes on my impassive expression. His tussled bronze hair tickled my cheek as he leant his head on my shoulder. He manoeuvred me easily away from the oak circle, but still let his words carry on the breeze. Just because we were out of sight didn't mean we were out of mind. I knew his constant obsession for me provoked an unjust interest amongst the other faeries. So did he, but he relished the attention.

"I can't do that," he promised. "If you did see how much I love you, you wouldn't ask for that." He almost sounded disappointed.

"I'm happier blind," I assured him in a heartless tone.

"You haven't even heard the trade I was offering," he reminded me softly, gliding one hand up beside my body and then tracing it lightly across my emotionless features. "I thought you'd want to know."

"You thought wrong," I said through gritted teeth. "I don't want anything from you. I never have and never will."

"Now that's a bit harsh," he told me. "And let's not make assumptions. You might like what I can do for you. You might truly want it. You might be grateful."

"Might doesn't promise you anything," I assured me. "But I can promise I'll never accept."

"Aw, honey," he purred. "Don't be that way. I can honestly make this worth your while. I promise. I just need to hear you say it."

"Promise is a big word for you," I said harshly. I felt his lips flick into a smile beside me.

"True, and I saved it just for you. See what I'm already giving you?" he asked. My jaw tightened. He frowned slightly beside me, and when he whispered his question this time, I knew that only I could hear it. "Do you want to see something truly amazing?"

He didn't give me the chance to reply before his thoughts were in my head. It took me a moment to recognise the images as they danced in my sight, but

once I had, the emotions inside me simply twisted. This was the nightmare I'd had for the past seven years, but this time, everything I saw was clearer; every shudder of leaves and flutter of dust was noticeable. I wasn't me - I could feel the anticipation inside this memory.

I saw my own form pause and still as the glorious face of the Faerie Mistress froze me. I heard the deep sounds of another person, but this mind discarded those sounds as easily as air. With an undeniable pulse of expectancy, the shadow I was in moved forward, and I saw that this was the hand that pushed me, urged me onwards on that evening. I watched with my own dismay overshadowed by the memory's enjoyment as my body took a single step.

The time in this vision seemed like an eternity as I watched the same strong arms that were around me now lock my arms back then. I felt my whole body flinch as I watched my past self twisting in the invisible flames. I remembered the absence, the emptiness, as I saw the beginning of my conversion from Hiram's eyes.

The thoughts that he showed me became less distinct, and faded to nothing as everything changed. I didn't need to see it again to know what had happened. Dad had...

There was an agreement. I shouldn't have been chosen. Every person ever changed was chosen by a faerie, for whatever reason, and one person was transformed each year. It was on this night, on Hallows Eve, that that transformation happened. Dad had known about it. He'd never said anything, never hinted anything; he's just known. It was just something that his family knew, and the knowledge kept them immune to the choice - but he hadn't told me. I thought of everything he lost on that night, just because he had known. If he hadn't, I'd have gone, and it would all have been fine. But he didn't let that happen. He came.

I blinked and I was back to the present.

Hiram had never shown me this before, and yet my mind had told me countless times. I shouldn't have known what it seemed like to him before he showed me, shouldn't have dreamt of it every night, shouldn't

have been able to see what happened in his memory before now... but I had.

"When we choose," he told me gently, his hand caressing the side of my face. "It makes a connection. Whatever the reason for the choice, there's a join. That means you are linked to me. Forever."

He chose me.

"I thought I'd have you then," he continued, cupping his hand around my cheek and brushing my hair back. He moved around me and looked straight into my eyes as he spoke. "But now I just have to wait. I know I'll have you. Some day."

"No." I stepped back. My voice shook.

He smiled sadly. "So it's another year..."

I tried to tell myself that he was wrong. I just wasn't sure that I could last another evening like this. I couldn't stay away, I had to see my dad, but...

"My trade..." he crooned. "Do you want to hear?"

I blinked and kept my eyes on his face, trying to discern some of what he was thinking. I didn't want

to hear this; there was nothing he could offer that I would take.

"I can give you exactly what you want," he told me, repeating what I had heard endless times before. "I can give you anything - everything. You just have to say yes."

He enjoyed this. He enjoyed watching me go through it all, terrified and alone. He loved being able to see it all happen. One day that wouldn't be true though. He was so confident I would go to him, but when I never did, his tone would change.

"See, you're dad isn't exactly...well, he isn't anything," he began, keeping his tone low and his gaze steady. "He isn't mortal, you can see that. He has to hide away for most of the year... he doesn't need things like humans do... but he isn't fey. He isn't one of us, and never will be."

He wasn't fey... he hadn't been changed.

"The conversion is irreversible," he reminded me needlessly. "So you'll always be like this, always

watching. You can't get rid of this, and you won't forget it. And you might not change much more."

He chose me when I was young. Being faerie meant that once you reached a certain age, you just stopped aging. It was immortality, but at a stable age. I had hoped for as long as I could remember that that wouldn't touch me - that aside from the sight, nothing was different about me - but I knew that was wrong. I was frozen as I was now, and I had known that for months.

"You'll always be this way, but he doesn't have to. He can turn back to what he was like before, he's only... withdrawn from that life right now. He hasn't changed, he ages just as he should. Think about it. You see him one day a year, and with him growing older when you can't see..."

I could only see him on one day of the year - I'd accepted that - but to realise that he continued to grow and change when I couldn't see him...

"You can't get away, but he can get back." I felt the falter in my heartbeat as I began to understand what he was saying. "I can arrange that. I can sort it all out

- finish the trade that shouldn't have happened. If you say yes, things will be as they should be."

As they should be. Me as faerie. Dad as human.

I turned my face away, unable to see that the very faerie who could be answering my prayers was the one who had ruined it all, the one who had followed and taunted me... the one I feared more than the rest.

"His humanity for my conversion?" I clarified, my tone cracked and shallow. The words echoed from my voice, but felt as though they caught in my throat. He smiled lightly to see I understood.

"Exactly," he breathed. His lips froze for a second and he leant in. My breathing hastened as I saw what he was truly offering. And all I had to do...

He turned my face back to his and stole a kiss on my lips. At first he was hard, leading, but his lips were soon moulding to mine. They softened, his thoughts falling back to what he wanted more than anything else. I remained motionless and still, waiting for the moment to end. His hands were on my back, holding me to him, so I knew I couldn't get away.

His body was moving, and mine was moving with him.

One of his hands left the other and traced up my back and to my neck. His hand gripped at the roots of my hair, pushing my face closer to his. My eyes closed as his other hand left my back and pulled my arms around him. I meant to drop them away the second he released them, but the motion was lost.

Both of his hands met over my shoulders and the icy texture of his supple lips on mine sent shivers though me. But they weren't shivers of revulsion or protest; they were of want and longing. It wasn't him I wanted... I didn't want someone like him - someone as obnoxious, as blunt, as controlling as he was - but he still felt me responding. He still pulled me closer.

I just wanted someone. I wanted attention and someone who would give it to me. I wanted to know that someone cared, and, as we stood here like this, it was easy to imagine he did. I didn't have to remember whose arms I was in; it just felt good to have someone around me. I simply let myself forget that I feared this. I just ignored that it was him.

When he moved, even slightly, I did to. When the low moan sounded from his throat, I could feel my body thrumming in return. My hands uncurled from the fists they had formed, and ran over his strong back. I felt a new kindness in his kiss as he realised my acceptance. He forced his lips to mine, keeping the pressure gentle, but still not offering me the chance for escape.

The air around us melted. Everything else left. He never left me a choice in this, but I found myself wanting more. Not more of him; but more of this.

His lips broke away from mine and my eyes flickered open. They found his face, but I was still dazed. I felt the fall as rationality began to return to me.

"And then I'll have you forever."

I staggered back.

The confidence that had dared to hover around me for that moment was gone. The amusement shadowed in his eyes and etched on his face slashed straight through me like the blunt blade of a tarnished dagger. As that delight intensified to an

audible laugh, I knew that that feeling was visible on my expression.

"At night, you dream of terrors," he whispered in my ear, lowering his voice again and keeping the smile in place. His laugh wasn't at me or for me; it was of me. He finally had want he wanted. "I only dream of you."

I thought I didn't want someone like him, but he thought that he knew he wanted someone like me. He wanted me. He could be obnoxious, controlling and forward, but he thought that he knew what he wanted. And I thought I knew what I didn't. One second, he was harsh and mocking; the next, he was gentle and caring. Everything he had said tonight, he meant. The only difference was that before tonight, I had never seen that side of him. But what I had seen told me there was so much more...

His hand curved around my face, and the coolness of his touch reminded me of what I had to fear.

"Soon enough," he repeated, his eyes scraping up and down my body, almost assessing. "I wouldn't be surprised if you were nearly there now."

Suddenly, I found myself wishing for this more than I had wanted anything ever before. I didn't want him - but it was easy to forget it was him when his lips were on mine. I didn't have to remember it all; I only had to know that someone wanted me. Someone cared.

"You know I'm right," he said, voicing the truth that I fought in my mind. There was no way, even in my broken shape, that I could not understand that. "Do you remember the last time?"

He smiled, a tight, arrogant and antagonising smile as he took my silence as a yes. Last time; when he had told me I wouldn't be able to escape this. I might have been able to escape the transformation, but I couldn't escape the sights and nightmares.

"That's what I thought," he smirked - he was still the one who laughed at my discomfort and revelled in my fears. He leant in quickly and pecked me on the cheek. I didn't have the heart in me to object, not when I had just been reminded of the moment this had all begun. He grinned at my impassive state. "I bet you wish I was wrong."

He didn't know how right he was.

"I've got news for you," he breathed, as the moon trekked its solitary way to centre stage. The silver beams filtered through the trees and the whole of my surroundings shook with uncertainty. "I'm never wrong."

"There's a first time for everything." My voice pushed the words through my lips, although I didn't consciously relay them. It was only the echo of the notes in my ears that assured me I had spoken.

He laughed a single, throaty chuckle, never lifting his penetrating gaze from me. "You wish. Just imagine what it could have been like - what it would have been like if this had never happened."

It didn't matter who was telling me to do it; my mind obeyed the wistful request on impulse. I was lost for a moment, reminiscing. I tried to remember what everything had been like before I knew. My mind had never ridden my memories of the simple, happier times, it was just the rarity at which I saw them that made them seem gone. I could see the way that we

laughed, the way Mum smiled, the glittering of Dad's eyes as he laughed... Ignorance is bliss.

"That's right," he whispered in my ear, the harsh tone that coated his voice ripping my peaceful thoughts and dragging me brutally back to my reality - the reality that had my nightmare dissolving around me. "Imagine what you can never have."

What I could never have...because of him.

"Now imagine what I can give you," his voice whispered. The tone enclosing his words was low and seducing. I heard a smile on his lips as he continued, and my heart sank further with every word. "You'll be asking. Soon enough."

He lips touched my cheek, and that was the last thing I felt before the shivers of the whipping air ran through me. The softness, the kindness, the care, it was all there in his parting kiss. My knees buckled beneath me and I sank, shaking, to the ground, the first tears of faerie falling silently.

As midnight's darkness pulled everything of this mystical world away from me, the icy air swirled

past my body. Every creature whose presence I had relented dissolved into the chill of the night and I was left, alone, to face another year. The droplets rolled down my cheeks as my hands ran over the beaten earth beneath me. The silence of the echoing clearing behind me only pulled my thoughts back, and I realised, once again, what a pointless fight this was. They were right - all of them. They were only waiting.

I could still imagine the cold lips of the faerie I feared pressed against my skin.

Chapter 2

~Faerie's Whim~ 2

Ok, so I said I might carry on with this - here's a bit more for anyone following. Leave me comments, tell me what you think and if I should continue! This is kinda the beginning of the second chapter, but I wanted to know what people thought before I carried on.

Hope you like it!

~JJ~

Six Months Later

"Ok...where to sit you, where to sit you..."

I glanced up; Miss Liles was mumbling again and that was never good. It was the first time that I noticed the girl stood next to her, but a swift glance at the clock told me that she must have been there for at least five minutes, probably introducing herself. The very same glance told me that everyone in the room was staring at her; there wasn't a hint of embarrassment on her expression, and I realised from the glaze in Tina's eye that she was going to be another one of 'The Gang'. She must be something special if Tina was sparing her a glance from Byron; and even he looked impressed. Vaguely, I wondered what I had missed. Mainly however, I was content to go back to the paper in front of me.

As soon as my eyes switched back to the empty notebook I had on the desk, I felt several pairs of eyes on me. I prayed that this was just out of practise and not from some other supernatural thing I had to cope with; but either way the attention of the class flickered to me for a brief moment. The reluctant look on Miss Liles face told all, and my isolation in this class was shattered when her hollow eyes fell on the seat beside me. Part of my mind had known that

it was the only empty seat in the class, but I hadn't connected until that moment that that meant she would be sitting beside me.

That would explain the mumbling. Even the teachers at this school had given up on involving me in things with other people; they'd tried for a while, but all it did was get me teased. The thing that fazed them was that I never said anything back, or did anything back, or got upset over any of it. At one point they assumed that it was because I thought I deserved what they said to me, and then they sent a letter home to Mum about a summer camp for building confidence and self esteem. The only reason she'd sent me was that it meant she could think she was helping me when she didn't have to face the failure every day. Of course, when word got around that I'd actually had to be sent to this camp, it only resorted in more teasing. Then the teachers gave up. Luckily for me, no-one bothered to get to know me enough to realise that I had psychiatrist meetings at least once every week.

I aimed my gaze at the ground as I pulled my pulled rucksack out of the way of her seat and a few

seconds later she fell into it. Everyone's eyes were on us; even Miss Liles didn't want to turn away. I hated to think that it would be like this for days; possibly weeks before anything changed. And that this wasn't a normal lesson; this was tutor, and that meant two fifteen minutes sessions every day. Even once things finally fell back to the normal division in the class, separating me from everyone else, I would still have the school's newest fixation beside me for that time.

My eyes skated up and down her before she looked at me. She had her thin, black hair pulled back into a scruffy ponytail, a few of the brittle strands threatening to snap. The sparkle in her sea-green eyes was a result of her outgoing personality, and even at this angle I could see she wasn't one for makeup; yet. No doubt Tina and her followers would change that soon enough. She had a thick bracelet strapped around her fat wrist, almost strained because of its small size. Everything she wore was a size too big, but it was obvious that it was to conceal what she could of her body. She turned to me.

"What? No hey? No hi? No anything?" she asked confidently, smiling. She fit into The Gang perfectly. At this school, weight meant nothing - it was your mouth and your jokes that got you high. Seeing as I never got involved in either, I was right at the bottom of the school hierarchy; leaving me open for teasing. Seeing as what they all thought didn't bother me in the slightest, their teasing usually lost its point after a few hours anyway. For once, I actually considered replying, but Tina's high pitched squeak interrupted before I could.

"Don't bother Stella, you won't get a word out of her," she mocked, looking straight at me with snickering eyes. "She never speaks. It's quite sad actually, but she's been an outcast ever since her Dad-"

"Tina Coils - outside!" Miss Liles snapped, pointing abruptly to the door. Tina only put on her face of false innocence, widening her eyes slightly in fake surprise. It wasn't as if that look was new, she'd been using it since the beginning of secondary school, but she still plastered the expression on as though it wasn't practised or planned.

"But why, Miss? I was only explaining to-"

"OUTSIDE!"

I thought Tina had learnt not to tease me. As soon as she'd stopped, everyone else had too. Sure, that didn't stop the odd comment in the lunchroom or a snigger in the corridor, but it had been much worse. Being publicly ridiculed every day by the same group of people usually produced better results than a victim who just stood it out; but that wasn't why she stopped. It hadn't taken her long to work out that the strange occurrences that seemed to trail her co-existed with her teasing of me. Everyone suspected that I did it, but there was no proof; and never would be, because it wasn't me. It wasn't my fault if she managed to coat herself in someone's lunch when we were out on the field at lunch; nor was it my responsibility to make sure that she checked what was in front of her before she walked, but somehow, the gossip had still begun.

I stared at the blank sheet on my desk, and swivelled my eyes to the pencil in my hand. I only drew because it kept my hands and my mind occupied.

Again, the teachers never tried to stop me - they considered it some kind of outlet, meaning that it 'freed my subconscious unintentionally'. I didn't think that was true, mainly because I couldn't escape what it was that was playing on my subconscious. It did explain why I was failing most of my classes.

When I was like this, I knew I wouldn't be able to draw anything. It was a way of relaxing slightly, and when there was someone right beside me who would now have a million questions on a topic I never discussed, 'relaxing' couldn't really be considered a prospect. As soon as I moved I had everyone's attention again, but that was just a disadvantage of being continual gossip.

As I stood I flicked my notebook closed and pulled my rucksack up from the ground with my other hand, slinging it over my shoulder as I straightened up and lifted both my book and pencil from the desk. This wasn't the first time I'd left class part way through, but it never ceased to amaze the school's population that the quiet girl of the year group had the courage

to bunk. I was out of the door and half way down the corridor before Miss Liles called after me.

"Elvira - come back!" Even with her sharp tone I could hear she didn't hold out much hope for my return. The shouts erupting from the classroom behind her prevented her from being able to do much more; although I knew it wouldn't be long before she phoned the office to say that I left. They probably wouldn't even be surprised.

My legs carried me slowly through the maze of corridors and halls, already knowing the destination. Our school was split into several buildings, which made it awkward to escape the wandering eyes of faeries even here. Admittedly, I was more grateful than necessary that they couldn't enter the buildings, but even then the bursts of breaks and lunch seemed too much to me. I didn't know what caused it, but a faerie simply couldn't enter a confined space (i.e. a building) without some kind of invitation from someone inside. As they mostly remained inconspicuous and unseen, they rarely entered any building. As far as I could see, that was the only

reason there weren't hundreds of them at school, posing as students. Being invited in every time you entered a building could be difficult to negotiate without suspicion.

I knocked on the door before me and heard a faint 'come in' from inside. I pushed open the door hesitantly, and Mr Montgomery glanced up at me over his thin glasses.

"I had a suspicion I'd being seeing you before long Miss Davis."

He pushed a sheet of paper towards me, accompanied by a pen and gestured for me to sit down; as was the routine. He picked up the small phone on his office and pressed at the keypad; but I knew who he was calling. The office would have phone him to say that I'd left, and now he'd have to call them back to say where I was. If I came here, I only had to right down why I'd left class; if I actually skipped anything, I'd have to explain it all later and I'd get a detention for it. I rarely got a detention here, as long as I could justify why I'd left. What the teachers considered justification from me was often

so simple that it didn't take long to convince them. I had heard a brief conversation between a few of my teachers claiming that some students were beyond help; and it didn't take long for anyone to work out that I was one of them in their eyes.

I sat down, but didn't pick up the pen. I just stared at the sheet of paper, debating what to write. Mr Montgomery replaced the phone, and set back to his work, not distracted in the least by my presence. I bit my lip. I wanted to write it; but every time I did it made me seem more helpless. It just made me think about it all, and then I realised how useless it all was. If I didn't think about it, it was easier to ignore. That was easier said than done. After a few minutes of silence, Mr Montgomery glanced up at me. He didn't look expectant or disappointed, and there was barely any pity in his eyes; a feat impossible for most staff at this school.

"Elvira, you need to write this," he reminded me. He didn't expect me to say anything; although he knew that if I was going to, it would be to him. I was unsure of exactly how many of the school's staff were

aware of that, but as far as I knew, he didn't tell when I spoke. He was different to most of the other teachers. If they showed anything when they spoke to me, it was either an undeserved pity, or an awkward gesture; but Mr Montgomery just treated me like anyone else. His pen was still poised over his work, his other hand paused from skimming across the sheets in front of him. He didn't fidget in his seat when I connected my empty eyes to him, he just held my gaze, his penetrating, emerald eyes making me feel as though he understood more than he let on.

The bell rang outside, and I heard the immediate scuffles and shoves as people tried to get to their first classes. I dropped my eyes from his.

"Go on, off to class," he said to me. I stood and slid my bag onto one shoulder. He tapped the paper. "Take that with you. You'll have it written and back to me by the end of the day, won't you?"

I nodded solemnly.

Stella fell into practise with the rest of The Gang instantly; it wasn't hard to guess that she'd been in the same position back in her old school. Either that,

or she'd undergone a huge change when she moved here. The glamour that the rest of them practically carried with them was rubbing off on her; by lunch she'd already had her hair in three different styles, and was beginning to branch out with makeup.

Of course, because there was a fresh mind to tarnish; I was once again the centre of their attention. Tina had learnt not to tease me, but having a new 'friend' beside her gave her the confidence to start again. After the first few insults and shouts in first period, she'd grown even more daring, seeing as nothing had happened to her. This confidence meant that she was practically following me on my way out to the field, relishing in the opportunity to mock me in front of the others.

I was past the point of bothering to listen to her calls; it was only when they stopped for half a second that I glanced back, recognising the silence. Polly was whispering something in her ear. Her face lit up, so presumably it was something with even more potential than what she'd been throwing at me all day. She turned quickly to her right, and hurried out

of the door, in a rush to get to wherever it was Polly had reminded her of.

The second she stepped outside she lost her footing and slipped over. Molly and Polly caught her quickly, and when I glanced absently back at them, they were all glaring; having just staggered back through the door. What they didn't realise was that she'd hadn't simply stumbled; the faerie outside had tripped her, and by pulling her back into the building they were stopping it from going further. I just carried on, uncaring.

When I eventually made it out to the field, I saw Stella laughing with the rest of them, only Polly, Molly and Tina absent from the gathering. The Gang consisted of only seven - now eight - people.

There was Tina, who was basically the head girl at the school - the one who always plastered herself in makeup and made you wonder how hideous she was without it. Polly and Molly were her cronies, they did everything she said, when she said it because they were too dumb to think of any objections. I know

that sounds harsh, but really, there wasn't another way to say it.

Where there was Tina, there was Byron, her steady boyfriend; head of the guys at this school. He was your typical guy, but with amazingly tanned skin, impossibly strong muscles, an absolutely gorgeous face and perfectly thrown hair. Kyle and George were his back-ups; they practically followed him everywhere and laughed at whatever he said because it got them into the popular group. Byron had a reputation for fights, but still managed to maintain the position of the hottest guy in school; everyone took his side no matter what the quarrel.

Then there was Greg. To be honest, I had no idea how he'd made it into that group, but he was always there, strong and silent in the background. He had thick, curly black hair that fell forwards across his face and shielded his eyes from everyone. He was your mysterious stranger I suppose.

So that's the seven. I suppose Paul could be considered part of them too, but he was only with them half the time; he got along with them all, but

still had the freedom to go where he wanted. Paul was Byron's twin brother - they weren't identical, but were frighteningly close. Paul's hair was slightly darker than Byron's, settling for a deep sand colour rather than bleach blonde. He was quite strong for his age, but with his brother being as he was, you barely noticed when they were together. His expression was thicker, and his face wasn't quite as lean, but it could still be difficult to tell them apart. Then again, if you saw one of them on their own it was probably Paul, seeing as Byron was constantly flanked by at least two Gang members.

The last three arrived just as I sat down. I always sat here, under the steep branches of the silver birch at the edge of the field. That meant that most other people gave it a wide berth, afraid that if they were seen with me they'd be subjected to the same bullying I was. Being friendless didn't particularly bother me, it only made it easier to keep things a secret. I looked at my bag for a moment, debating whether or not to get my lunch out. With a sigh, I flipped open my still-empty notebook, deciding I wasn't hungry enough to bother.

"Hey honey," whispered Hiram, sitting beside me. I glared at him for half a second, but I was aware of the attention I was still getting from the groups sitting not far away. Glaring into space wouldn't help anything.

I hated this. He literally followed me everywhere, and that was precisely why I never went out; but I couldn't do anything about school. If the teachers found you inside you got kicked out, so it was easier to just put up with him; but not by much. If I so much as looked at him for a second too long, I'd have a new reputation running around the school by final bell.

I grabbed a pencil from my pocket and put it to the paper, but Hiram's eyes didn't leave me. I had to keep my eyes down at lunch. If I looked at anyone real, then rumours would fly about them; and if I stared at any faerie, no-one would be able to understand. They were more around than I liked to admit, even if most of them didn't interact with humans.

I started to trace my pencil across the page, with no conscious idea of what I was drawing. I felt Hiram's eyes skate from the paper to me, but he was used to

the silence. He moved in front of me, so I just kept my eyes down. After a few moments, the designs that spiralled from the pencil tip held his attention and I noticed his brow furrow in concentration from the corner of my eye.

"Where did you..." he trailed off. That wasn't like him. I looked up to see the confusion in his expression. I quickly flickered my eyes back to the page when his hand started to trace across it. Usually, he just watched me, or he wandered around - causing mischief but keeping me in his sight. He had been about to leave when he saw what I'd drawn, I could tell. I just needed to know why he was so encapsulated by the symbols.

The laughter interrupted that my trance was fierce and proud, and I looked up from the fresh patterns in my notebook. They were all looking at me, which wasn't a good sign. Seeing as none of them were getting up to come over here, I knew it couldn't be that bad. Byron wasn't there, but it only to a second to see he was with Paul a little while away, confused

as I was by the outburst. Not to forget that he was flanked, as usual, by the two guys behind him.

"Hmm," Hiram considered, his eyes following mine. "This could be interesting."

He flashed a thoughtful grin, and then he was on his feet, racing towards them. I didn't have it in me to stop him, and even if I did, there would be no way to do it without causing a stir. The Gang only thought I was staring at them. It was only after a strong 'wind' pulsed against them, scattering their bags, lunch, books and hair that they thought anything of it. Tina had food in her hair, Stacy's things were fluttering away, Polly and Molly almost screamed, and Greg had everything done to him, including and hit in the back of the head. Whatever it was that they had been laughing at I supposed it was him who'd said it. Hiram looked up and me and grinned, searching for anything in my eyes.

Moments like this made me think that he was only trying to impress me with it all.

The look on Tina's face was priceless, even to me. I bit down the faint smile that wanted to arise and

stood, closing my book as I did so. I slipped it back into my pocket and picked up my bag as Byron and the guys rushed over to help them all. I turned my back on Tina's glare and started to walk away.

Hiram strolled casually over to my side. He linked his arm around my waist, but there wasn't anything I could do when no-one else could see him. He leant in so that his lips were beside my ear. "What did you think?"

I didn't answer, or acknowledge the question. I just kept walking, leaving the chaos behind. I ignored the irregular glances that I got from other students, relieved for once that the teachers stayed inside at lunch. With the suspicions that would be circling after that, I doubted if there was anything I could say about it.

"Oi!"

I glanced back to see Byron tearing after me, leaving a baffled Kyle and George to deal with the others. I turned away again, a little shocked. He turned and skidded in front of me before I could take another

step. I looked up at his panting figure, silent and waiting.

"What did you just do?" he demanded.

I didn't say anything, I just stepped back. He stepped forward, so that he was towering over me. Hiram slid away from me. I looked up at him, ignoring the threat in his eyes and keeping to my silence. His jaw flexed as he waited, and my eyes jumped to his hand, almost in a fist.

"Elvira!" He said my name like a command, like a warning. Even if there were stories and rumours about the connection of those things to me, no-one had ever gone as far as to confront me about any of it. But last time Tina had teased me was before she had Byron.

Hiram was behind him, and pulled him back - fierce and fast, just a mischief and faeries are supposed to be. Byron staggered back a step, and then I did too, worried about his reaction. Hiram was behind me in a second, his arms around me with a smirk on his face. He didn't realise what Byron could do. Byron turned his face back to mine, positively fuming. We

had a lot of attention and my stomach squirmed to know it.

He stepped toward me again, fierce and hard, not ready to stop for anything. When he was right in front of me, he looked down on my slight frame and repeated his question once more, his tone even crueller than I thought possible. Both of his hands were in fists and his whole body was quivering as he fought the urge to throw a single punch. I broke from the fear.

"Byron, get away from me! I didn't do anything!"

He was shocked that I spoke; and everyone turned to face us. I regretted it instantly and felt the colour drain from my expression. He didn't lift his ruthless glare and the silence around us rang out for a moment.

"How did you do that?" he insisted harshly as soon as he recovered. I stepped back and didn't say anything more, leaving my empty and scared eyes on his flaming ones. Hiram moved with me, not worried in the slightest. "Elvira - answer me! How did you do that?"

"What do you think I am? Some kind of witch?" I asked him, disgusted, as a little spite branched through the fear. Knowing what I should be was one thing, being accused of it was completely another.

"Not a witch," Hiram breathed in my ear. He liked it when I was like this, when I really spoke back, because he knew how rare it was. Even though he knew I was only like it when I was scared, he still loved it. "A faerie."

"I don't know," he admitted. "But whatever you're doing - stop it."

I scoffed and turned away, realising how many people were watching us in the process. Normally, I wouldn't have done anything like that, but just then, I only wanted to get away. He grabbed my arm and pulled me back, twisting me around to face him. I tried to get out of his hold, but he only held tighter. Hiram growled under his breath, his mocking tone lost.

"Don't walk away from me," he ordered, his voice low and menacing.

I narrowed my eyes. "I do what I want."

He stepped closer, looking down on me as his hand tightened more. "No. You do what I say. Now get lost."

I fell backwards when he let go of me, and for a second, I saw everyone's laughter start in their eyes. My right hand hovered over the fresh bruise on my left arm and I looked up at him, seeing what no-one else could. The second I was out of the way, Hiram's fist whipped back and then to him, cracking against his nose. Byron stammered back, clutching his face, and the hilarity around us died away instantly. I fixed my glare on Byron as he cupped his hands beneath his bleeding nose and closed his eyes in pain. When he opened them again, there was fire bearing down on me. Hiram kicked his legs out from under him, but Kyle and George caught him before he could fall.

Everyone's eyes jumped to me, motionless on the ground.

Someone finally noticed the crowd and a few teachers burst through the throng of students. All eyes switched from the boys, who, although injured,

were still on their feet, to me, on the ground and breathing heavily, with the most astonished of the school's population still focusing on my impassive expression.

"What's going on here?" Mr Parrot asked, his rocky glare switching from the panicked expressions on Kyle and George, holding a bleeding, cussing Byron, to me, staring up at them without an ounce of surprise on my face. He glanced around at the numerous dawdlers who were still watching. "Get to class! All of you!"

I stayed on the ground, watching them, and lifted a shuddering hand from the ground to tuck my hair back behind my ear. Our principle was looking down on me with a confused expression, whereas the boys followed my movement with frightened importance. When I stood, all of their eyes followed mine and I stared back at them.

"Mr Rivers, I suggest you go to the nurse's office," Mr Parrot said, his eyes skating simply over the scene we presented. "And then I'd like to see you in mine. And you three I'd like to come with me right now."

I switched my eyes back to Byron's, pleased to see a little fear mingling in his alongside the confusion. Then I turned away and started to walk away.

"Miss Davis - that includes you."

I ignored him and headed away. I could still feel all of their eyes on me as I jumped the fence at the end of the field and turned down the street. Hiram locked his arms around me and I held my head high.

He would've pressed his lips to my cheek, if he could. Instead, he just smiled and said, "You did good, love."

"Where have you been?"

"School," I said truthfully.

"They phoned - said you'd run off! Elvira, how could you?"

I deliberately wasn't looking at her; the disappointment was already sounding in Mum's tone, I didn't need to see it in her eyes as well. I kept my mouth shut, unsure of exactly what I could say. Even if I could tell her that I left because I wasn't ready to be questioned about something I didn't do; she would

then ask exactly what had happened, and I'd end up lying again anyway. Better to just stay quiet.

"And what was all this talk about a fight?" she asked, exasperated.

I shrugged, unable to comment. I would have to find out what the others had said before I came up with my own story. If they'd simply said that I'd hit them, I'd have it easy. If they'd specifically said that I hadn't hit them - which I really doubted - then me saying I did would only confuse things. I didn't honestly think that anyone would believe that I would hit them anyway, but if they said it and I agreed, there wasn't much they could do.

I kept my eyes down and waited for her to say something else. There were a few minutes of silence, but practise prevented me from showing how uncomfortable it felt to me. The only thing that interrupted it was the ringing of the kitchen phone. Mum appraised me for a moment.

"Just go to your room," she ordered, before hurrying off to grab the phone.

I stared after her for a second, but then turned to my bedroom. She had tried to say it harshly, as if I would really hate it and she was saying it just because of that; but I could see through that. I slumped down on the bed.

She was saying it purely because she didn't want to have to deal with me right now. She knew I wouldn't tell her what happened, and she knew that anything I did tell her would only confuse her further; that was just the way things were.

She'd given up.

And that was pretty much the story of my life.

Chapter 3

~ Faerie's Whim ~ 3

I know it's been ages, sorry about that!

I almost lost everything a few weeks back though, my memory stick almost died - and that meant three major stories (the two that I'm posting and one that I'm not) and a ton of schoolwork. Truthfully, I was more worried about the stories, which is probably a bad sign when I've got a load of exams coming up, isn't it?

Ah well - it's here now. Hope you like it!

JJ

Faerie's Whim

I didn't particularly want to be awkward; I just didn't have much of an option right then. If I'd had the chance to find out - one way or another - what the rumours circulating really were, or even what the school faculty believed had happened, things would be easier. As it was, I had no idea what anyone believed, and therefore had no idea what I could say.

"Elvira, I won't ask again. What happened?"

Of course, I knew that every other time Mr Montgomery had utter that sentence, he had some rebellious kid before him who'd point out that he had just asked again, whether or not he meant to. I just looked down, practically admitting I'd done something; even if I had no idea what the precise confession was.

"If you don't tell me what happened, then we'll just have to assume that everything else we've been told is correct, and then you'll get punished for that - whether or not it's true," he told me. That was good, I reminded myself. I wanted them to believe the others. "Now, I don't think that's fair. I think we need

to have your view on things before we do anything. So far, what we've heard has been...strange."

To me, strange was just a one word summery of my life. There were others too - painful, lonely, wrong. Strange was just one aspect of it, but it was something that I had to keep hidden from other people.

"Now, I certainly don't believe you would provoke them," he continued softly, still trying to urge me into speaking. "But unless you explain what really happened, there isn't anything I can do about it."

Mr Parrot chose that point to burst into the room. Even without hearing the beginning of the conversation, he got the general gist of it, realising instantly that I was yet to say a word. As always, out head teacher assumed that every student he was faced with would deny doing whatever they were sent to him for, and leapt straight down my throat. My guess would be that that approach worked on most other students; it would normally make them say something, even if it wasn't the confession they were looking for.

"If you didn't do it, why did you run?" he accused harshly.

I looked up, but stayed silent. He expected it. That didn't mean he was pleased. I almost blurted out some kind of reply about the fact that he was stood there watching at the time, and that if he'd really thought anything of it he could have stopped me, but I knew that wouldn't help anything. Besides, my stomach was squirming violently at the thought of speaking out. I never used to be that bad; it was only since I had something that I couldn't tell anyone that I'd almost feared saying anything. When it all started I tried to act normal, but it was so difficult not to let anything slip, especially when I had to converse with some people and then ignore others. In the end I saw it was easier just to stay silent; in the long run.

Our head teacher was notorious for his temper. The odd thing was, I was sure he was madder now, when I said nothing, than when he had streams of students answering back and mucking about.

"Elvira Davis, I need an explanation from you right now!" he was saying, turning red as he spoke. My

eyes took in the change in shade wearily, but I didn't respond. "Did you or did you not hit Byron Rivers?"

I didn't, my mind said. I looked down again, unable to truly say what my thoughts would have preferred. This was one of those moments when keeping the secret was harder than others, but I knew I'd get through it. I could already see both the teachers before me tiring; it wasn't as if they had anything to loose - I was the one who would get punished.

"Unless you tell us precisely what happened..."

I waited it out, wishing that their shouts were the only voices I had running through my mind.

"Oh - did you hear...?"

"Do you think it's true?"

"That's not what I heard..."

"But she can't have-"

"Maybe something's finally clicked. You know all those pity stories."

"I reckon..."

Whispers followed me all day. It wasn't exactly unusual for me, but it was abnormal that I heard so many of them. Apparently, my 'discussion' with Mr Parrot wasn't quite as quiet as I assumed; the whole school seemed to know about it by lunch. Everywhere I went I heard conversations break off only to continue just before I was out of hearing range, and felt the eyes that followed me every step of the way. The tension in the air increased every time I hesitated or pause almost pulsed from around me. I felt sick when I realised how literally I meant that.

By lunch, I had heard so many different rumours that the whole thing was almost laughable. Whether the school's student body believed I was really caught up in some scheme, or that Byron had faked the whole thing, or that me not moving was a trick of the light wasn't my concern. I wouldn't have cared about any of it if it wasn't for the fact that I almost always caught just a few snippets of the conversation, and that I always wished those few snippets were true. There wasn't anything supernatural in the suspicions that fell around me, but really, there wouldn't be.

I didn't plan to go outside; I would do anything to avoid what was following me today. Usually, I was used to it, but it was the reason behind it that plagued me. The detentions I had for the next week meant nothing - I was shocked I hadn't been suspended. The thoughts that refused to leave my mind were the ones that told me what Hiram had done. I was the centre of attention because he'd hit Byron...but he'd done that because of what Byron had done...to me.

I let my hand move the pencil in my hand idly across the previously empty page before me, and hoped that my moment of solitary would last. In this school, privacy was a rare thing, especially when rumours almost refused to drop your name, but, alone at the back of the furthest classroom from the field on a glaringly sunny day, I had managed it.

I hadn't been in this room before, but I like it. Yes, the paint on the walls was peeling, and the posters were slightly aged, and I supposed the blinds needed replacing, but it felt safe. Maybe it was the idea that even if the blinds were broken and the sun still

streamed into the room, no-one knew I was here. It wasn't dark, as I preferred, but it wasn't painfully bright.

I liked the dark; I just didn't like the night.

Being alone had never been an easy concept for me, not when Mum was afraid to have me out of her sight and I was reluctant to leave the confines of the house, but alone was nice. It was simple; it was quiet; and most of all, it was comforting. I didn't have to ignore everything around me; I didn't have to live up to any expectations or hear any stories that flew when I walked past; and I didn't have to fight to keep silent. If I said anything now, although it would only be me who heard, it wouldn't matter. I kept quiet because it was the only way to deal with this, but there was no-one to think anything of my words now. Even so, I didn't let my voice disturb the serenity around me.

I watched the designs spiralling innocently from the tool in my hand, and couldn't quite believe they were merely a product of my imagination. The twists and turns of the lines and symbols looked as if they were

pulled straight from a fantasy - the changes being subtle and hidden one moment, yet sharp and impermeable the next.

Slowly, I set my pencil down at my side.

I hadn't been drawing like this a month ago. I knew that practise made my sketches and drawing better, but after doing it for so many years, I also knew that any changes should be so evident so quickly. I flicked back to the first page of my book.

The first page was blank. I'd always wanted to put something significant there, but nothing ever seemed special enough. There wasn't a single word written in this book; only my drawings and sketches occupied the pages.

I could see the contrast in my drawings instantly. Everything that had erupted from my fingertips over the past week had been swift and smooth, whereas some of these looked a little rigid. I remembered how proud I'd been of the scribbles as soon as I'd finished them, convinced - at the time - that they were the best thing I'd ever done. Slowly approaching my more recent diagrams, I realised that although they'd

improved dramatically, I hadn't really felt proud of any of them - almost as if I expected them to turn out the way they did, despite improvising everything from the moment my pencil touched the paper.

"Outside! Come on - the lot of you!"

I jumped, feeling my heart pound in my chest. The shout from just outside of the classroom startled me, and although I knew my reaction was irrational, I clasped my notebook to my chest, feeling my fingers dent the pages as they held it harder. Apparently, I wasn't the only one avoiding the outside air today, even if I was the only one searching for sanctuary in its least likely place.

"But Sir," someone whined, dragging the title out almost endlessly.

"But nothing," a voice said sternly. "Outside!"

I heard numerous groans from the students being ushered away, but they went without much other protest. Standing slowly, moving as fluidly as I could with the fright still pumping inside me, I slid my bag onto my shoulder and moved slowly away from the

wall, heading for the door. I wasn't sure where I was planning to go, but I knew that staying here for much longer would be stupid and would probably get me caught. It wasn't as if I feared the consequences, I just didn't like the idea of facing our head teacher again.

As I silently crossed the classroom, I felt the reluctance I hadn't realised I'd escaped descending upon me again, increasing further when I reached the door. The assurance that had been inside me before had appeared so gradually that I hadn't really noticed its presence until it was forced to leave again. I heard the irritated sigh from the owner of the voice I'd heard as he turned back, and watched with dismay as the door handle I was about to clasp began to turn, freezing.

"John!" called a voice outside. The handle before me froze and the shadow sneaking under the door curved away a little in response. "John!"

It was then that I heard the chants from outside.

"Fight! Fight! Fight!"

I felt sick to the stomach.

Who wanted to stand by and watch as someone got beaten? It was so primitive it was almost unbelievable. When the handle before me snapped back to neutral as 'John' released it, I couldn't quite tell if I was relieved or not. I wasn't up to facing another episode with any of the teacher just yet, but knowing why he was leaving didn't help me at all. It was just disgusting.

My knees buckled.

It wasn't that it was disgusting that bothered me so much. If they wanted to hurt themselves to make a few people laugh, it shouldn't be my problem. What did bother me, was that so many people wanted to laugh at it - at seeing others hurt themselves. And the faeries were just the same; except when they fought, it was a lot faster, a lot fiercer, and a lot more terrifying. It was images like that that haunted me every time the thought of conflict entered my mind.

I always cut across the field when I wanted to get home fast. And then I slipped through the rec-centre; I'd never had a problem before today. As most days I wanted to be inside as soon as possible, it wasn't

unusual, although I didn't expect to see anyone - sure, occasionally there was the centre's staff to think about, but aside from that, it was very rare to see anybody.

Today was one of those lucky days when Hiram vanished off to somewhere else, and I fully planned to take advantage of that fact. I never really wanted to stay inside all afternoon, I just preferred to be in my house and alone than out with him, so days like this always meant I could take a little longer. It was chilly, but that didn't put me off. The heaters in the rec-centre were on anyway, so as I snuck into the gym, felt the heat rushing towards me, clinging and gripping at every part of my skin and making me shiver. I closed my eyes and relaxed for a moment; I might only be passing through, but the serenity that always seemed to encircle me here was something I never failed to note.

It was different today though.

"I thought I'd be seeing you here," a voice came. I almost jumped, but managed to stop myself, my eyes opening to search for the voice I'd heard from the

shadows. As the gym didn't officially open for another few hours, there wasn't usually anyone else around. I located the guilty figure in a second, but couldn't see who it was, his whole body shrouded in darkness.

Eventually, after accepting I wasn't going to respond, he stepped forward, into the sunlight spilling from the high windows.

"Now, I think we have some unfinished business to attend to," Byron informed me, smiling when I stepped instinctively away from him. He took two, confident strides in my direction, and was far too close for comfort before I could do anything about it. "Do you have anything to say before we start?"

Looking at his rigid form towering above me, I was frightened. As much as I hated to admit it - even to myself - the anger I could already see mounting inside him scared me. I felt my stomach start to twist as I watched the colour drain from his face. When people were shouting, they either turned red or pale; red meant that the blood beneath their skin was close to the surface and around their face; pale

meant that their blood was going to their muscles to prepare for a fight. Even without the volume accompanying his voice, it was easy to see how he was feeling about it all.

But I hadn't done anything wrong.

My heart crushed when I realised he wouldn't know that - and there was no way for me to prove it.

"You don't have anything to say?" he asked quietly. If I hadn't known it was there, the menacing edge to his tone might not have been noticeable. His hand found my wrist, although is hold was only loose - at first. "Go on. Just say something."

I might have said something, had he given me the chance. But he snapped before I could get there.

I had to clench my teeth together when he twisted my arm, turning me away from him but keeping me in his grasp. He'd clearly had practise at this. As my heart rate quickened, I could almost feel the superior air around him.

"If I tell you to do something - you do it, got that?" he asked me fiercely.

I narrowed my eyes and felt my head shake slightly, although more from disbelief than refusal. He smiled. It was tight and harsh, he wanted this. He pushed me away, shoving me against the wall and forcing a sharp gasp through my lips. He let go of me and stepped back. After a silent moment, I heard him laugh. Raising a shuddering hand to my lower lip, I felt the throbs pulse through my body at the motion, and when I pulled it back, there was blood on it.

"So," he began, as two pairs of hands grabbed me, one on either side, and whipped me around to face him. He eyes were laughing, even if his expression was feigning innocence. "Do you have something to say to me?"

I didn't - couldn't - look at him.

"If I tell you to do something - you do it," he repeated, his tone alone suggesting nothing more than a casual comment. "You will learn that, and I don't mind doing it the hard way."

One of the hands left my arm and shoved the back of my head roughly forwards, intending my eyes to fall to Byron. They flicked downwards for half a second,

but then I looked to the side, anywhere but to the face in front of me. For a second, the only sound was my heavy breathing. He smiled again and leant in, towards me.

"Got that?" he breathed, lifting my chin with one finger. I pulled back, away from his touch, letting my eyes fall, disgusted, to him. He smirked and motioned to the other two. They just pushed my forwards, within his reach again. "We aren't going until you answer."

"Oh my god! Baby - what happened?"

"Mum," I moaned, shrugging away from her.

She grabbed my arm - the sore one - and whipped me back around to face her. I grimaced, but couldn't protest, just closing my eyes against the pain. "Elvira Christine Davis - what happened?" she demanded.

Tears sprang to my eyes for a moment, although I couldn't quite say why. I blinked them away before they could show. It might have been that I knew she wasn't going to let me go this time because she hadn't used my full name like that in years. It might have

been that her hand tightened slightly when she shouted. It might have been that I knew I'd had worse pain than this before. Or it may have been that Dad had given me that name - Christine - and I hadn't heard it in my mum's new, tight voice before. It linked me to Dad - but her tone took everything from it. I swallowed as I blinked them away.

As I tried to step back, all she did was hold me tighter, and it was a fight in itself not to scream. I'd never thought Byron was that strong. "Young lady! You are not going anywhere until you tell me precisely what happened!"

"Mum," I repeated, just wanting quiet. With my free hand, I rubbed my head, my other twisting automatically away from her. She tensed and didn't let me go. "Mum, please..."

Even without looking at her I could tell what was running through her head. She wanted an answer, but knew I wouldn't give one to her. She wanted this to be over, but couldn't just leave it. She wanted an escape from this almost as much as I did, and she didn't even know what she was hiding from.

Eventually, she spoke.

"In the car - now!"

"No, Mum," I said sharply, almost gasping the words as I jerked away from her. "I'm not going anywhere."

My voice cracked, but I still turned away. Everything hurt as I pulled out of her grasp, but I ignored it - too focus on keep the tears in my eyes from falling. I knew she swiped for me again, but I dodged it and slipped into my room, locking the door behind me. Mum shouted for a while, demanding an explanation, but eventually turned away.

At least I'd gotten in before Hiram got back. If he hit Byron when he grabbed hold of me, I shuddered to think of what he'd do when he found out about today. Hunching over and rubbing gently against my stomach, I really hoped the bruises I could feel forming would go quickly.

Chapter 4

~Faerie's Whim~ 4

Alright, I know that this took forever to upload, and I apologise for that, although I should be able to write this quicker from now on because I just got a whole flood of ideas pouring in and have a really good plan for the plot now that'll make it move faster. This chapter's kinda slow, but I'll make up for it - promise!

Enjoy!

JJ

Don't look at them, my mind chanted as I swivelled through the overcrowded corridors of the school science block. Don't look at them, and maybe they won't see you.

"Where d'you think Darren is?" someone asked. I hated stopping - it meant I didn't have any reason not to hear the snippets of conversation around me. There was a pause before the reply.

"I dunno, he was in this morning..."

"But so was Byron."

I slammed my locker shut - much harder than I meant to - and turned away, fighting to keep my pace even as I walked. The silence that followed me made me regret the burst of anger.

Byron this, Byron that... Was there really nothing better for this school to talk about than where one student was today? And was it really necessary for the discussion to arouse only when I was close by? I had been in the library all morning - it was one of those rare occasions when the room was actually open to pupils during break - so why everyone felt the need to associate Byron's leaving school with me I had no idea.

Truthfully, I thought, diving off into a side corridor to avoid the staring eyes. That was only half right. I

knew his leaving did have to do with me, I just didn't understand why everyone seemed to realise that.

Of course, it wasn't as if Byron's departure had been particularly inconspicuous - a flashing ambulance racing out of the school car park right before second period wasn't something that one could hide in many ways.

Keeping my head tilted forward so that my face was aimed down and hidden by the mask of my flowing hair, I dodged my way through the school crowd. I clutched my folder to my chest, my arms folded securely across it so that they were tight against me but weren't obviously so. I could sense the eyes on me as I moved. The sea of people almost seemed to part at times, which was the opposite of what I wanted. Yes, I wanted to get out of here quickly - last lesson had dragged on for so long that I thought it might never end - but I didn't want the attention of it. If I stayed within a mass, there was less change of Hiram even noticing me, and I knew he was around somewhere. There was no way for him not to be, and

after the intense way he'd looked at me this morning, I was in fear of what he'd do next.

Somehow I'd managed a lift to school. Mum didn't want me to come in to begin with, but I'd still convinced her to drop me off. It had been a really stupid thing to do - for all I knew she'd swerve the car around and haul me off to go and talk to Doctor Collins, but she hadn't. She'd thought about it, but hadn't actually done it. As soon as she'd parked the car in the school lot I'd been out of the door hurrying towards the building. The second I'd caught sight of him, I'd sped up. What a mistake that had been.

I knew that running attracted more attention than just walking - the sudden change had made him look up. He was actually preoccupied for once until I'd pivoted the attention back to me. As soon as he'd moved in my direction I broke into a full sprint for the building. I could not face him then. Everyone else had look up then, so I had to tear straight through to the girls' loos to try and cover up my sudden change. It hadn't been the most flattering off options, but it was better than dropping straight back to a walk as

soon as I was in the building and having everyone think I was completely insane.

It hurt. As soon as I was inside and away from all of the prying eyes, I'd practically collapsed back against the door, relieved there was no-one else in the room.

Right now, as I forced my way through the students fighting for the gate, I had to bite down sharply on my tongue to stop myself crying out every time one of them brushed against my shoulder or my back. If I stayed within the throng, perhaps I could get far enough away that Hiram wouldn't see me. Perhaps. I hoped so.

I glanced up and froze.

He was there, by the gate, and his eyes were scanning the crowd. They were flicking from face to face, searching for something. Someone. Me.

I bowed my head and again and steered to my left, letting my hair fall across my face. If I went out of the back of the school, I could take the path by the woods and... run into about twenty other odd fairies who had worse planned for me that he would even

consider. I was almost a celebrity among the hidden world around us. Every faerie knew of my escape, including the newly changed. Whenever I saw someone else in that position - crouched, shaking, terrified - I felt terrible; I knew what it was like to be there, even if I had gotten away. They just didn't seem to see it that way. They saw me as the one who ran from what they hadn't had a choice in, and was winning. The one who got what she wanted.

How wrong they were.

When someone shoved roughly past me - irritated by my change in direction and slow pace - I spun where I stood but knew my balance had shattered. I tumbled and heard the sound that escape my lips as my body impacted the ground.

It was some kind of cross between a whimper and a shriek, smothered as low as possible, but made people turn their heads. No-one offered me a hand to help me up, and I didn't expect them to, but by the time it occurred to me to struggle to my feet, I knew it was too late for me to get away with making the whole journey home without any acknowledgement.

I was just about to push myself to my feet when I heard a voice behind me - one that I knew none of the others around me could hear.

"Need a hand, love?"

When my arms buckled - partially from the shock, although mainly because of the aches shooting through them - his hands were on my back and pushed me easily to my feet, as if I weighed no more than a feather. I swivelled automatically around as soon as I was up, stepping instinctively away. The people around us shot me weird looks, glancing at the supposedly empty air before my when my eyes focused on him.

I felt so many responses bubble to my lips in that moment that I simply didn't know what to think.

The look playing in his eyes was arrogant - just the same as it had always been. He had the same cocky grin on his lips that he'd always had, the same confident stance, the same attention-seeking throw to his hair, but he looked so different to me. I knew he'd been the one - he was the reason Byron was race off

of the school grounds in a flashing ambulance, I just couldn't do anything.

Holding my breath to combat the twists of my stomach, I turned away, half-walking-half-running back in the direction of the school.

He fell into step beside me without a problem. He knew I wasn't going back inside. I was going out the back way, through the forest, with the faeries, where I might actually be able to combat some of what was going on around me. I could say something at least, look at him without everyone thinking I was mad.

I didn't like the way he looked at me. There was something in his eyes that wasn't right. There was something new there, something I hadn't seen before. I kept my head held high as I walked, which was unusual in itself, and slipped past all of the others around me without gaining too much attention. It wasn't until one of Paul's friends pushed roughly past me - presumably as a way of retaliation for Byron - that I realised. It didn't hurt.

My quick intake of breath was the shock, not the pain as he assumed. He just smirked and kept on walking.

I completely froze. It didn't hurt. Slowly, looking straight ahead, I moved one of my hands across my stomach. There were no more bumps. No more sore places. No more bruises. My muscles didn't hurt when they moved.

As soon as the realisation settled in my mind, I ran. I sprinted as fast as I could, clutching my jacket to my sides to stop it slowing me down, letting my bag beat heavily against my back with each stride. I knew he'd done it - knew it was Hiram, but for that moment I didn't care. I just wanted to get away, get somewhere private, somewhere secluded, and then I'd be able to deal with this. I didn't know what I would do yet, but I couldn't just keep hiding.

Hiram held back a moment, but I didn't look. Whoever had just hit me, made me understand, was suffereing his wrath now. It only held him a moment. Before long he'd caught up to me, and was at my side, flying invisibly beside me. He smiled, true, but it wasn't as carefree as it had always been before. Beneath his smile, I saw what he was trying to hide.

Just for a moment, I saw it. That glimmer in Hiram's eyes looked a little bit like a want for...protection?

About the Author

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